

Henry A. Waxman  
Remarks for the JFK Lifetime Achievement Award  
June 5, 2014

I would like to thank all of my friends at the Los Angeles County Democratic Party for honoring me tonight.

I also want to congratulate tonight's other honorees – Kamala Harris, Fiona Ma, Jay Hansen, and Serio Rascón – who all exemplify excellence in leadership.

I am especially honored to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award named after President John F. Kennedy, who inspired me and an entire generation to see public service as a noble calling.

John Kennedy sparked an activist spirit at college campuses when I was a student at UCLA. I cut my political teeth as a member of UCLA's Young Democrats and I joined forces with other students like Phil and John Burton, Howard Berman, Dave Roberti, Willie Brown, and Phil Isenberg who all went on to remarkable political careers.

I was first elected to Congress in 1974 as part of the legendary Watergate class. It was a large class of 92 members made up mostly of Democratic reformers who came to Washington to shake things up.

We wanted to end the antiquated seniority system in Congress, which allowed a handful of Southern Democrats to stymie civil rights legislation. And, we worked to end the concentration of power in the executive branch amassed during the Nixon presidency.

We believed government could be a force used for good. We believed it could create a fairer and more just society.

In short, we shared the opposite philosophy of today's Republican rebels in Congress who simply don't believe in government and work as hard as they can every day to make it as dysfunctional as possible.

As I reflect on my congressional career, I am grateful to my friends and allies who have worked side-by-side with me on the issues we care so much about: health, environmental protection, women's and gay rights, and strengthening the ties between the United States and Israel.

I am often asked which law I've authored has been most satisfying to me personally. I can't pick just one. They are all important to me because they all improve public health and safety in some way.

Legislative Achievements:

Waxman-Hatch Generic Drug Act (1984), which created the generic drug industry, saving families more than \$1 trillion over the last decade alone.

The Ryan White CARE Act (1990), which provides medical care and other services to Americans living with HIV/AIDS.

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (2009), which restricted the marketing of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco to children and gave the Food and Drug Administration jurisdiction over tobacco products.

The Nutrition Labeling Act (1990), which mandated nutrition labels that consumers rely upon to compare packaged foods.

The Food Quality Protection Act (1996), which established a strong health-based standard for pesticide residues in food.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (2011), which sets science-based standards for the safe production and harvesting of raw agricultural commodities and requires new preventative controls for companies that process or package foods.

Medicaid. In the 1980s I led the fight to expand Medicaid, providing health coverage to millions of low-income children, pregnant women, and seniors.

CHIP. In the 1990s, I worked with Senator Ted Kennedy to provide health coverage to the children of working families through the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Affordable Care Act. In 2010, when I was chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, one of my lifelong dreams was finally achieved: Congress passed the Affordable Care Act, which guarantees access to affordable health coverage to all Americans.

1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, which established new programs to reduce urban smog, hazardous air pollution, acid rain, and prevent the depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer.

Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments, which strengthened the standards for drinking water and established funding mechanisms for drinking water infrastructure improvements.

Climate Change. My one regret is that we haven't been able to I have led the fight in Congress for limits on carbon pollution that is causing global climate change. When I was chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee in 2009, I was able to get a climate bill passed in the House, but the Senate didn't act.

Congressional Oversight. Congress serves an important role through oversight. Investigations I led on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee identified billions of abuses of taxpayer dollars, especially in Iraq. We also held hearings to reveal the causes of the mortgage meltdown and Wall Street crash.

Israel. I have worked my entire career to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Many people ask me if I'm leaving Congress because it's no longer possible to work across the aisle to get things done. There is no question it is harder to pass legislation in Congress today. But enacting laws that make America a better nation has always been hard. It will be hard in the future, but it will always be worth the fight.

It is time for me to give someone else a chance to represent the district I've been so fortunate to represent for nearly forty years.

Thank you again for the great honor you have bestowed on me, and for your friendship, which I will always treasure.